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All literature is of course packed with just such allusions, perfectly familiar to cultivated readers of the author's countrymen, but needing commentary among youthful students beyond the frontiers. I submit that this and similar *explications de textes* can be more profitably used to make annotation copious than the transfer of a portion of the glossary to the notes.

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LANGUAGE SEEN HISTORICALLY

Managing Editor, MODERN LANGUAGE JOURNAL:

Permit me to express my pleasure on noting in your October number the letter of Professor Hacker on the logical subject introduced by *de* in French. For the benefit of any teachers who do not have access to large university libraries, special mention should be made of two studies dealing rather conclusively with this subject, both by Hilding Kjellman:

1. La construction de l'infinitif dépendant d'une locution impersonnelle en français. Des origines au XVe siècle. Uppsala 1913.

2. La construction moderne de l'infinitif dit sujet logique en français. Etude de syntaxe historique. Uppsala 1919.

Any signs of renewed vitality in the study of Romance syntax must be hailed with joy by all sincere lovers of these languages after its seemingly moribund condition of the last few years. No justification of the study of syntax should be needed; the statement of the problem should carry its own convincing evidence with it. The teacher who is not gifted with the probing mind reaches but a slight depth of understanding of his subject, whether that subject is a modern language or one of the sciences. His knowledge tends to become dogmatic and his teaching autocratic if he does not consciously increase their depth and breadth by original investigation not called for in the college schedules. No one can expect the young student, who is being gently led into the labyrinth of scholarship, to arrive at any original explanations of difficult language phenomena; but the student has little chance of later evincing originality or clear thinking in any marked degree unless, under the encouragement of competent mentorship, he is early led to develop them to the extent of his capacity. Surely if the teacher feels neither interest nor responsibility in the matter of knowing the *causes* for the locutions he uses every day, but is on the other hand content with a mechanical and parakeet-like repetition of rules and sounds, the student is being cheated out of one of his most important linguistic birthrights.

It is without doubt one of the few dangerous corollaries of the direct method that the student attains a certain facility in the *rendition* (in its etymological sense of *giving back* to the instructor)

of current phrases without in the least understanding their present form. Furthermore, the student usually believes, and is given to believe, that words have some inalienable and divine right to be employed in certain groups and in certain orders. It never occurs to him, nor is it usually pointed out to him, that perhaps the most basic language postulate is that every construction has a past, a present and a future. The law of the survival of the fittest, as well as that of evolution, is quite as applicable to language and its component parts as it is to humanity and the individual man. Without this language postulate the invaluable contributions of such Romance scholars as Diez, Meyer-Lübke, Menéndez Pidal and many others would be lost to us.

One of the most frequent means of exonerating and even of hallowing a profundity of ignorance on the part of the teacher is that of calling a construction an idiom. This is generally taken in the secondary or tertiary sense of *idiotisme* (*idiotismo*) as something lacking in reason, not in its historical sense of something individual, specific. Thus the student is told to memorize so many idioms, with never a word of explanation to suggest that, while these language developments are the hardest and most individual of constructions, they can often be satisfactorily explained in the matter of growth and change. The hundredth sheep is more interesting than the ninety and nine, linguistically as well as Biblically. Granted that the origin and development of many so-called idioms are still shrouded in conjecture, nothing is argued thereby except that there remains plenty of interesting work for us to do. Would it not be a source of lasting regret to us if our students, among whom there are undoubtedly some excellent mental capacities, should be permitted to be content—in fact should be forced to be content—with any mechanico-apologetic method of language study? Let us teach our students the direct method by all means, any *direct* method, since their interest is largely in the spoken language; but let us give them a modicum of the philosophy of language as well. Let us not stultify our individual initiative nor that of our students with any talking-machine method. The phonograph record may be the conveyor of much beauty of thought, but no one can accuse it of doing any original thinking.

These few paragraphs are not intended as a denial of the value of the direct method, nor is it desired to eliminate or even diminish class-room frills. A very earnest plea is made, however, for the intelligent application of both direct method and drills to the end of encouraging the pupil not merely to think *in* the language, but also *about* the language and *for* the language (and the greatest of these is *thinking* at all).

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